

AMHERST PUBLIC ARTS COMMISSION

Fiscal Year 2011

The Amherst Public Arts Commission had a very successful and productive year, producing two major arts installations: the second edition of Shedding Light (the lighting of the tobacco shed) and the first Amherst Biennial.

The first Amherst Biennial ‘10: Art in Expected & Unexpected Places exhibited the works of 44 local artists at 13 locations all over town, including two farms, the decommissioned East Street School, several storefronts, art in the park (Kendrick) and five galleries. This exhibit was co-curated by Susan Loring Wells, director of the former Fiber Arts Center; Tony Maroulis, co-director of wunderarts; and artist/curator Terry Rooney, Chair of the Public Arts Commission.

Terry Rooney initiated this first Biennial after many galleries had closed in our town. She wanted to find new venues for local artists to exhibit their work, to bring attention to the wealth of talented artists in our valley, and to bring art to the public, including adults who are not regular gallery or museum goers, and children. The Amherst Biennial enriched the cultural landscape and exposed more than 100 students from Pelham and Amherst schools to contemporary art. Local college students received guided tours by the artists and curator Terry Rooney.

The Biennial was a huge success, receiving a mention in the *Wall Street Journal* and critical acclaim in *Artscope* magazine, the *Springfield Republican*, the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* and the *Amherst Bulletin*. The Commission hopes to increase our audience for the next Amherst Biennial in 2012.

Many groups were involved making this first Biennial a success: both former Town Manager Larry Schaffer and present Town Manager John Musante provided permission and support to install the “Portal,” a steel sculpture by Matt Evald Johnson in Kendrick Park and use of the East Street School for several arts installations. The Department of Public Works was also instrumental with the installation of sculpture in the park. The Portal sculpture ties in nicely with Yankee ingenuity, recycling worn-down local snow plows parts. It is the Commission’s and community’s hope that this sculpture will become a permanent public arts piece in our new Kendrick Park.

Local businesses also provided great exposure for the artists by allowing them to display art in their storefronts. We also sold artwork out of the Hastings Stationary Store window for \$2,500 to someone who had never been in a gallery. Two local farmers also opened their fields for the installation of Nancy Winship Milliken’s “Pleiades,” her grouping of 20-foot sails made from sheep’s wool from local farms. They “sailed” from South Amherst’s Thistlebloom Farm to the North Amherst’s Swartz Family Farm. This installation was also held over for the second lighting installation of the tobacco shed of Erika Zekos’s “Shedding Light. (Please see blog for photos.)

The Amherst Biennial could not have happened without the help of many volunteers, including members of the Public Arts Commission, artists and many others who covered the gallery,

helped with social media and promotion. Notably, Terry Rooney was able to pull off this first Biennial without any grants. Instead, she was able to harness assistance from local host sites, artists and volunteers as well as her own tireless energy and vision. The beautifully designed catalogue by Elizabeth Pols continues to promote the quality of art in our region and was given to the artists to use as a promotion tool to advance their careers. Because of the overwhelming response of the community, and local media, Terry Rooney is already at work planning to expand the next Biennial, to include local colleges and the Emily Dickinson Museum.

Erika Zekos's "Shedding Light," the lighting of a tobacco shed on the Swartz Family Farm is another Amherst Public Arts program that enjoyed its second edition in December '10. It was complemented by an array of photographs at the Nacul Center that were inspired by Erika's installation by Donald David, Charlotte Meryman, Stephanie Oates and Anita Ribak-Licis. One of the photographers even went skyward to present on aerial view, which was featured in a short documentary (produced by ACTV videographer Catherine Stryker), which was also presented at the Nacul Center.

The Public Arts Commission continues to develop relationships with many community leaders and arts professionals. One of the Commission's most ambitious goals is to expand the cultural landscape by continuing to rally support from local leaders, the arts community and area businesses for APAC Chair Rooney's plan to recycle the East Street School into a new Amherst Arts Center.